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NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Teklum

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Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community[1]

JUNE NASH
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The breaking-down of a social-control system based on belief in the guardianship of the spiritual ancestors and their temporal agents, the curers, is reflected in a rising homicide rate as people turn to individual sanctions when threatened. The acts of homicide differ in their social significance according to who is killed, the context, the agency, and the motivation of the killer. Thirty-seven homicides between 1938 and 1965, analyzed in terms of these component variables, reflect the conflicts arising from competition in new economic enterprises, the rising suspicion of curers' abuse of their supernatural power, and the loss of belief in the guardianship of the ancestors.

THE social impact of homicide has caused some analysts[2] to treat it and its supposed inverted complement, suicide, as one kind of behavior with a single meaning, ignoring Durkheim's caveat that behavioral rubrics categorize diverse phenomena. Here I shall analyze the variety of strategies involved in killing in a Mexican community, which I shall call Teklum (the Tzeltal term for village), and endeavor to show how rules of behavior are expressed in killing and in attempts to avoid being killed. Further, I shall endeavor to point out what these indicate about structural and organizational changes both within the community and in its relations with the wider society. Since suicide is absent, except for a single case of a madman, I have restricted my enquiry to homicide.

Teklum is a predominantly Indian township of Mexico. The population of the town center—about 1,900—includes only one Ladino, or non-Indian, family, that of the schoolteacher. The sense of community is limited to people living in the center and in the four nearby hamlets (*barrios*).

The town center is divided physically and socially into two endogamous sections, called "upper" and "lower." The outlying hamlets are linked to the nearest section by social and economic ties. The civil and religious posts of the town are, in local theory, apportioned evenly between the sections. This was in fact true until the 1950's, for each of the ranked posts had a paired complement, so that both sides of the dual division were represented, and the single posts of president and *síndico* (the president's administrative assistant) were al-

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621
632 ternated for each three-year term between the
178 upper and lower sections.

But with the recent increase in dealings
621 between the national and regional administra-
632 tive centers and the local communities, re-
178 cruitment into office as president and síndico
554 has come to depend upon the candidates' possessing a knowledge of Spanish, literacy, and familiarity with the ways of Ladino society. Because of the relative scarcity of such skills, selection of these two officials has tended to ignore the former residence requirements
[887] relating to the dual division. Along with this change in the criteria for selecting these officials has come a decrease in the power and the authority exercised by the *principales*—elders from each side of the dual division who rose to their position by passing through all of the lower offices in the hierarchy—and a corresponding increase in the importance of the presidency.

621 This dual division also affected the structure
632 of the curing profession. The curers are men
754 who can overcome sickness caused by witch-
756 craft because of their possession of an animal spirit (*swayohel*) and their knowledge of ritual. In each of the two sections of the town was a leading curer (*stalal ʔuʔul*) who, by virtue of his age, experience, and recognized authority, was able to control entry into the profession. Their function was to prevent as well as cure, for the leading curers were also charged with guarding their section against the entry of
621 witchcraft. In the last two decades, leadership
632 by recognized elder curers from each side of the
756 dual division has been lost, and along with it
178 control over limiting the practicing of curing.

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632 It is in the context of these structural divisions that social change and its behavioral indices must be analyzed.

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182 Homicide—an act viewed as a delict in national Mexican law—has in the past two decades become an accepted strategy in social interaction. It is part of the expectations of the society upon which members predicate their own code of behavior and in terms of which
[626] they react to others. Gossip not only fails to
[521] suppress homicide, but serves to create a con-
[764] sensual base for condoning it. The corpse is referred to as "the one who had the guilt," *?a stukel smul*, and even when knowledge of the particular act is lacking, certain assumptions are made: the killer was someone in the community; the victim provoked the killer. In listing crimes, informants sometimes failed to
682 mention killing, or they included it after witch-
674 craft, theft, or adultery. Homicide is con-
[824] sidered a *reaction* to crime, not a crime in itself.

The rate is phenomenally high—up to 251.2 per 100,000 (when adjusted to bring the whole township's population of a little over 3,000 to the base for measuring international rates)—and it is increasing. This compares with national rates of 4.8 for the United States, 31.9 for Mexico (United Nations Demographic Yearbook 1964), and 36.2 for a nearby town (Favre 1964).

The following tabulation summarizes the homicides by decades since 1915, the earliest date for which records are available.

1915–1924	4
1925–1934	5
1935–1944	19
1945–1954	9
1955–1964	35

[114) Figures prior to 1950 are not apt to be accurate, for only since that time have there been adequate reporting and checking of township records. In the following tabulation, the marked increase in the annual number of homicides since 1960 represents a real increase.

1950	1	1958	1
1951	0	1959	1
1952	1	1960	4
1953	1	1961	7
1954	1	1962	6
1955	0	1963	7
1956	1	1964	4
1957	4	1965	9

682
674
121 In order to assess the meaning of its remarkable increase during the 1960's, I have pro-

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682 ceeded along two lines of enquiry. First, I have
674 analyzed the circumstances surrounding the
12 deaths in as many cases as my informants could remember. Variations in the components of homicidal acts—the setting, agents, purpose, and outcome—suggested the different assumptions underlying each case. Secondly, I have correlated the different kinds of homicide with structural and organizational changes in
682 the community. The analysis of cases in Sec-
674 tion I summarizes the patterned components
128 of behavior. The social environment providing the cues to the actors is explored in Section II.

682 165 [128] ## I THE PATTERNED COMPONENTS OF 37 HOMICIDE CASES[2]

The following tabulations and discussion are based on the 37 cases presented in Table 1.

Who Is Killed

Sex:	all male	
Age	18–22	5
	27–30	7
	34–38	7
	42–48	8
	50	3
	60	2
	65	2
	70	2
	??	1
[463] Occupation	curer	8
	political leader	1
	farmer	28

One-half the total number of killings occurred to those between the ages of 34 to 50. However, as the six victims aged 60 and over indicate, survival to a late age does not ensure that one will die a nonviolent death. The age of the victim may be correlated with motive, insofar as some events leading to conflict occur
68 only at certain times in the life cycle. Thus,
[578] betrothal conflicts involved only young men, while victims accused of witchcraft were older: 27 was the age of the youngest, and 16 out of the 18 men killed as witches were over 34. Cattle theft, on the other hand, occurred throughout the age range.

682 Eight of the victims—more than one-fifth of
165 them—were curers, a much higher proportion
756 than their share in the total population, for there are only about a dozen now living in the town center of 1,900.

682 There is a personality type recognized by the
156 community as distinctive of those who "get

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682 156 themselves killed." When they see a man who is abusive while drunk, who brags of his power and of that of his animal spirit, they will remark: "That man is going to wake up dead" (*sakubk'inal čamel*). When such a man is killed, no one complains, even among his immediate relatives (cases 5, 10, 14, 16, 19, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 31, and 32 are of this type). When I asked [562] why women do not get killed, the response was, "They don't look for trouble" (*ma sleik smul*).

682 *Setting*

	Total	Dawn	After noon	Evening	Night	?
Streets of town	11				11	
Milpa, woods, road out of town	10	2	3	2	2	1
Highway	4		1	1	1	1
In cantina	3		1		2	
In houseyard	3			1	2	
In bed	1				1	
Neighboring hamlets & towns	2		1			1
"	3					3
Total	37	2	6	4	19	6

Where the killing takes place and its timing in the diurnal cycle are directly linked. All of the homicides in the streets of the town were committed at night, while those in the roads out of town near the milpa occurred in the late afternoon or evening. In providing privacy and security from discovery, the darkness of night is functionally equivalent to distance from the 682 town center during the daytime. When I sug- 114 gested that the killings might be reduced if the town would connect the lights that had been installed in the streets, the response was that when they had been in use, killings had increased. The lights helped the killer find his victim, perhaps lying out in the road after a drinking session. He would shoot out the light and then kill his victim.

682 579 The only killings in which considerations of space or time were ignored were those in the cantina during a drunken brawl, for in contrast to the usual killing their onset was unpremeditated.

682 [527] The timing of homicide is related also to the annual cycle: 14 homicides occurred during the fiestas in the town or in a neighboring town. [579] The drunkenness of the fiestas provides an appropriate occasion for killing an enemy, although a drunken brawl is in itself rarely a [755] sufficient motive (two cases). Other opportune times are after a curing ceremony (six cases) [273] and after the gathering of curers during an

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682 epidemic (two cases), when people have drunk
[755] a great deal and their motive is fresh in their
[273] mind.

682 The settings in which homicides occur indi-
152 cate that a killer is expressing not his own
154 bravery but rather his fears. Wounds are fre-
[273] quently inflicted from the rear, and often the victim is outnumbered and set upon by a group. The victim is sometimes invited to drink with his killer(s), and in this session he is disarmed psychologically and physically. Alcohol reduces the chance of his effective reaction, and this is important when a knife or machete is used. Shotgun killings are done at a distance and do not require this tactic, although it may still be employed. For drinking
682 serves to reduce the killer's own fears. Drink
273 "heats the blood" and makes unusual be-
152 havior possible. One killer, in recounting his act, was not trying to prove bravery, but rather his own good judgment and cool-headedness. The killer fired at the victim while he was sleeping, his back turned to the door, and killed him. The shot also entered the arm of the
[695] sleeping man's wife. She saw the killer as he
[683] left the scene, but testified in court that she had seen no one. She was, in effect, accepting his verdict that her husband was a witch.[4] This homicide was not regarded by the killer or by anyone else as a heroic act, nor was the killer in recounting it attempting to emphasize anything other than the necessity of the act.

682 411 *Instrumentality: Weapons and Wounds*

gun	14
machete	6
gun and machete	4
knife	3
knife and gun	1
knife and machete	1
knife and stone	1
hatchet	1
nail	1
sandals	1
??	4

The variety of weapons reduces the question of any technological determinism to a minimum. The actual weapon used seems to be a matter of convenience. When more than one is used, it is usually evidence that the assailant had helpers. The nail is unusual. It was hammered into the jaws of a man who had entered the curing profession at an age considered too
682 young. The attack on the jaws of the victim
774 seems related to the power of speech and to the
156 [text continues on p. 461-B]

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TABLE 1. CASE ANALYSIS OF HOMICIDES OCCURRING FROM 1938 TO 1965
(AS RECALLED FROM MEMORY BY THREE INFORMANTS)*

CASE No.	DATE	AGE	WEAPON	WOUNDS	PLACE	TIME	SUSPECTS	MOTIVE	OUTCOME
1	1938—fiesta in neighboring town	50	pistol, machete	head cut off	in houseyard of boarded house in neighboring town	afternoon	?	Accused of witchcraft	No one apprehended.
2	1945	65	pistol	shot between eyes	in street	night	two drinking companions (relatives of victim)	Drunken quarrel	Two companions went to jail. Wife in jail, with help of witch from neighboring town, set fire to four houses in pueblo.
3	1946	48	machete (brothers disarmed him of shotgun)	?	road at outskirts of town, at cross	dawn (5 a.m.)	brothers: 1 elder, 2 younger	Curer, suspected of being witch.	One brother went to jail for five years.
4	1946	61	machete	well chopped up	neighboring hamlet	?	?	"I don't know what crime he had. He was a curer."	No one went to jail.
5	1946—fiesta San Francisco	38	machete and gun	well cut up, head and neck	in woods	?	?	Accused of witchcraft.	No one complained.
6	1946	50	shotgun	?	in street	night, after curing ceremony, very drunk	?	Curer, accused of witchcraft.	Wife complained, but no witness.
7	1958	37	nail	in throat	in street	night, after curing ceremony	father of boy who died of witchcraft	Curer, accused of witchcraft.	Before dying, victim revealed name of killer, but local authorities would not arrest him. Case went to higher court, but no witnesses.
8	1960—11/28	60	machete	cut off head	in street	night, after curing ceremony	son-in-law	Accused of witchcraft by curer at ceremony for daughter.	Son-in-law fled town.
9	1960—12/18 fiesta, Sta. Lucia	38	knife, machete	heart, throat, stomach	?	?	killer paid by cattle owners	Stole cattle.	Released killer on bail of 2,500 pesos paid by cattle owners.

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10	1960—12/18 fiesta, Sta. Lucia	60	shotgun	shot in back—bullet entered lung	houseyard, two feet from house	7 P.M., after curing ceremony	brother-in-law	Curer, accused of witchcraft.	No one apprehended
11	1961—8/16	70	machete	many wounds	near highway	9 P.M., after gathering of curers	neighbors	Curer, accused by other curers of being witch causing epidemic.	Neighbors were not identified.
12	1961	35	shotgun	shot in back	highway	?	leader of political independance movement (wife's brother)	Refused to pay tribute to Independence leaders.	Killer's wife (victim's sister) left husband. No one jailed. Later, killer killed by victim's brother [case 18].
13	1961—7/26 fiesta in neighboring hamlet	30	?	?	street, near cantina	late at night	wife's brother	Very abusive, fought drunks.	Wife's brother fled town.
14	1961—10/24 fiesta in neighboring hamlet	45	knife	many wounds	?	?	neighbors	Accused of being witch by neighbors.	No one apprehended.
15	1961—12/13 fiesta, Sta. Lucia	37	gun	?	cantina	late at night	?	Accused of witchcraft.	Wife agreed he was witch.
16	1962—9/25	18	?	?	?	?	rival for girl	Fought over girl.	No one accused.
17	1962—9/25	30	knife	stabs	in street	night (1 A.M.)	cattle owners	Accused of stealing cattle.	Went to jail, but released on bail put up by cattle owners.
18	1962—9/26	35	gun	shot in head	highway	(4 P.M.)	brother-in-law's brother	Revenge—victim had killed his own brother-in-law [case 12].	Killer declared he had killed. Paid fine and went free.
19	1962—11/13 fiesta, All Saints	20	knife, gun	stabbed in heart and shot	drinking in cantina	late at night	rival for girl	Fought over girl.	No one accused.
20	1962—12/24 fiesta, Christmas Eve	50	gun	shot between eyes	road outside town	dawn (6 A.M.)	leader of cattle association	Accused of stealing cattle.	?
21	1963—4/4	36	hatchet	head	in woods, given drink by killers	5 P.M.	?	Curer, accused of witchcraft.	No one apprehended. Brother did some investigating.
22	1963—7/24	45	?	?	in bed	night, after curing ceremony	Curer from neighboring town	Victim had accused suspect of being a witch when curing a patient.	Nothing.

* Two more homicides were recalled for 1964 than official records show. They most probably occurred in a previous year.

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[P 460] Tekium

TABLE 1 -(*Cont.*)

CASE No.	DATE	AGE	WEAPON	WOUNDS	PLACE	TIME	SUSPECTS	MOTIVE	OUTCOME
23	1963—8/28 fiesta, San Augustin	?	sandals	kicked to death	in cantina	afternoon	drinking companions	Barroom brawl	One of two assailants arrested, bailed out.
24	1963—9/25	70	shotgun	forehead	in field	late afternoon	sons of man whom he was accused of having killed by witchcraft	Accused by curers in neighboring towns of having caused sickness	Nothing.
25	1964—1/2 (eve) New Years	30	machete, gun	?	street outside house of new president	night (11 P.M.)	killer paid by brothers	Accused of stealing cattle	Brother fled, but was jailed when he returned.
26	1964—1/3 (arrival	14	gun, machete	chopped up with machete	street, one block from house	night (11 P.M.)	?	Accused of witchcraft by neighbors.	No one accused.
27	1964—5/11	30	gun	forehead	highway	afternoon	Ladino liquor distiller, not of community	Victim had denounced distiller to federal authorities.	No one accused.
28	1964—9/1	30	gun	?	milpa, after his brothers gave him drink	afternoon	his brothers	Accused of witchcraft.	One brother fled. The other was jailed but claimed the first one did it.
29	1964-9/14	65	knives	many knife wounds	street, three blocks from house	late at night, after gathering of curers	curers	Curer, accused by other curers of being witch causing epidemic	No one accused.
30	1964	22	?	?	eight meters from his house	night (1 A.M.)	close friend, hired by cattle owners, brothers of killer	Accused of stealing cattle	Freed on bail.
31	1965—2/14	42	machete	head cut off	road to neighboring hamlet	night (3 A.M.)	?—at first thought it was wood spirit, until they found head	?	No one accused.
32	1965—2/22	45	knife, stone	stabbed in heart, head bashed	street near house	night	?	Accused of witchcraft by neighbors.	No one accused.
33	1965—3/21 Carnival	45	shotgun	?	street	night	?	Accused of witchcraft.	No one apprehended.

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50	1965 6/25	27	Sikh	?	found in woods, body dragged there from town	night (1 A.M.)	brother-in-law	He had relations with 14-year-old sister-in-law. When he tried reconciliation, became drunk, abusive.	No witness, no blood found in in-laws' house.
51	1965 5/30 fiesta, just before San Francisco	35	shotgun	three shots entered back	road	afternoon	?	Stole cattle, corn.	Killers left note saying old man did it, but no one believed it.
56	1965 8/11	42	machete	head severed, side wounds	road to milpa	6 P.M.	son by first marriage	Failed to help son get a wife; accused by dying wife of causing her death by witch craft.	Widow spread rumors that it was his son, but refused to testify.
57	1965 10/7	20	shotgun	back	in houseyard	6 P.M.	rival for girl	Accident — killer mistook him for his brother, who was challenging killer's suit for a girl.	?

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682 794 756 location of the soul, *sc'ulel*, in the tongue, *yat*, wherein lies the particular power of the curer. This possibly suggested the mode of attack.

682 411 412 [223] [224] The instruments used to kill are carried by the farmers of this area most of the time. The men go to their milpa with a machete strapped to their side, a shotgun slung over their shoulder, and sometimes even a knife stuck in their waistband. They frequently interrupt work to hunt birds, rabbits, and deer. The shotgun does not excite suspicion or comment when it is seen. The men of Teklum are technologically prepared to kill in the course of an ordinary day's work.

682 [152] [683] The number of wounds and the thoroughness with which the job is done (see Table 1) suggest not so much the fury of the assailants as the fear motivating their act. In a witch-killing, it appears to be thought necessary to hack up the victim completely so that his power is effectively ended: one witch was cut into 32 pieces; another had 166 wounds.

682 674 656 The death acts drawn up in the local courthouse have been increasingly specific in their statements as to the wounds inflicted ever since the government's intervention in the case of an accidental death in 1950. The local authorities were threatened with a fine of 600 pesos if the details were not properly recorded. The careful measurement of the body in relation to the road and to neighboring milpas and the measurement of the size and depth of the wounds provide the screen of complicity that wards off further investigation by federal authorities and preserves local independence. There is never any questioning of suspects or attempt to solve the crime by officials. The success of the ploy is illustrated in the following account:

> Pedro had animals at the spring and had gone out early with ropes in his bag to lasso them. He was found with a rope tied around his neck hung from a *tzitzimit* tree. We went out and measured the length and thickness of the rope and how many centimeters it penetrated his neck. We put all these facts in the report, which gave the cause of death as suicide.
>
> At that time we had a schoolteacher in town who asked the dead man's wife why the town didn't investigate who killed him because someone must have done it. He went with the widow to the Ministerio Publico in the capital. Well, when they came out, there were all the facts in the death act. [Informant laughed heartily as he recalled this success.] He saw that we had discovered the body at 3 P.M., that the rope was 15 meters

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682 674 656 long, and that the body was suspended 35 centimeters from the ground. He saw that we had raised the act well, and nothing was done.

682 562 *Who Kills and Why*

The only universal factor among the killers is sex—only men kill (Table 2). Women do not kill nor are they killed in Teklum. This does not mean that they are not subject to as many tensions or abuses as men, or that these have no channels for expression. Women work through men by agitating them to homicide. [593] Sometimes revenge is delayed, for the agents chosen by women may be children who must reach maturity before accomplishing the deed (see case 36, in which the son's animosity toward his father was kindled at his mother's deathbed).

682 683 621 Neighbors are a significant group in witchcraft killing. (Neighbors may be listed in Table 2 under another relationship, for instance as brother-in-law or as cattle owner.) They are the informal judges of suspected witches, and it is frequently they who kill a man considered to be a witch. When the curers accuse a man of causing epidemics, his neighbors are usually the executors. [608] For this reason, most people try to neutralize the hostility of

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682 683 621 608 their neighbors by establishing *compadrazgo*, or godparental, relations with them.

Ten of the 37 homicides here reported were committed by immediate consanguineal or affinal relatives of the victim. The high f. - 682 quency of killings involving brothers or 593 brothers-in-law (8 cases) suggests a locus of 607 high tension in these relationships. Male [602] siblings, the *yermanotak*, comprise the closest [476] cooperating group. Cooperation between brothers is obligatory when wheat is to be threshed, a house built, or a roof rethatched. If a brother or brother-in-law is unavoidably absent, he must pay a substitute. Brothers, or sons and fathers, are the only relationship [428] pairs who work the milpa in common and share the harvest. Bilateral inheritance, with equal division of land and house to both male and female offspring, means that brothers-in-law are potentially equivalent in the competition for goods as well as in their obligation to cooperate. A man kills his sister's husband if the husband is abusive to the woman or to members of the family (two cases). The brother 682 627 figures not only as a lethal opponent, but also 593 as the man who avenges one's own death (case 18, Table 1). When someone has been killed for witchcraft, his brothers are expected to accept the verdict or to avenge the killing.

[Text continues on p. 463-A]

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TABLE 2. SUSPECT, BY MOTIVE FOR HOMICIDE

	BROTHER	BROTHER-IN-LAW	SON	SON-IN-LAW	NEIGHBORS	RELATIVE OF WITCHCRAFT KILLING	CATTLE	RIVAL OWNERS	RIVAL FOR GIRL	DRUNKS	NOT OF COMMUNITY	??	TOTAL
[688] Victim was accused of witchcraft	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	—	—	—	—	8	18
Victim accused suspect of witchcraft	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
[685] Cattle theft	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	1	6
[578] Rivalry over girl	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	3
Abusive behavior	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
[579] Drunken quarrel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
[627] Avenge a death (not caused by witchcraft)	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2
Political conflict	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
??	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Total	3	5	1	1	2	2	1	4	3	2	2	11	37

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000 cept the verdict or to avenge the killing.

682 In selecting a single motive in categorizing
674 the killer and the reason for his act, I have dis-
128 torted reality more than in the other tabula-
tions. Motivations include both the instru-
mental reason and the rationalization for the
act. The complexity of motivation is correlated
with the multiplicity of social ties existing be-
tween any two people. For example, when a
man shoots his father for failure to provide him
with his bride price, but feels justified and ex-
pects social approval because his mother on her
deathbed accused the father of having pro-
voked her illness by witchcraft (case 36, Table
1), it is impossible to assign a single primary
cause. However, in order to correlate the fac-
tors of agent and motive, I have been forced to
select only a single feature in categorizing
them.

682 In one-half of all the cases reported, the
674 motive attributed for homicide is suspicion of
175 witchcraft. (Whether or not witchcraft is ever
practiced here is irrelevant since men act in
terms of their interpretation of an event, not of
the event itself.) Almost all sickness in the
community is believed to be caused by witch-
craft (the term for witch and witchcraft,
ʔak'čamel, means "giver of sickness"). The
family of a sick person consults the local
curers, who pulse the patient. The witch "has
left his signature in the blood" of the patient,
and by pulsing him the curer can "hear and
feel" who the witch is. His procedure is to ask
the patient to tell what troubles he has had
with his neighbors and relatives, and as the
patient recites the names of the people with
whom he has had conflict, the pulse jumps. As
in the use of the lie detector, this indicates
where there is high affect: in Teklum it is inter-
preted as positive indicator of the guilty per-
son, the witch. If the curer gets drunk enough,
he may reveal the name of the witch, but he
usually prefers not to—I know of at least three
cases, one of which is reported here, in which
the man who announced the name of the witch
was killed by the person he accused. The fam-
ily may then check the consultation with
curers in neighboring towns or even in the de-
partmental capital. Since these distant curers
are not inhibited by fear of the witch, they
name the guilty one. The family, or the pa-
tient, may broadcast their suspicions, even
announcing the consultation over the loud-
speakers in the local liquor shops. If the pa-
tient dies, a member of the family may act on

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682 694 75 these suspicions and kill the witch. If he should kill the witch while the patient is still alive, it is believed that the patient will die.

682 685 674 [463] [697] Killing men for cattle theft (six cases) is a relatively recent occurrence. It has put homicide on the market: the associations of cattle-owners have hired killers in three of the six cases. In addition to the killer's fee, they pay the fine to release him from prison. Fines for homicide have increased in the past five years—from 1,000 to 3,000 pesos—but not sufficiently to price the murder of cattle thieves out of the market. A good bull is worth [435] 1,500 pesos, and the threat of further loss by theft seems to justify the expenditure of fees and fines. When the cattle-owners lose some 685 787 776 of their herd, they go to spiritualists or to San Miguel, the talking saint of Ixtapa, to find out who did the stealing. Since such evidence does not hold up in court, legal settlement is not 685 694 attempted. Legal action, moreover, would create an enemy who might seek revenge. A Ladino secretary of the town center who had lost a bull accused a man of stealing his cattle and demanded 500 pesos in compensation. By receiving the money he jeopardized his safety, and eventually he had to leave town.

The Resolution of the Case

682 69 It is nearly impossible to find witnesses to homicide. Of these 37 cases, 28 resulted in no action being taken by the authorities, and in five cases where the killers went to jail, they were released with the payment of minimal fines. In the calculations of the townspeople, it is hardly worth risking one's neck to get such a minimal revenge.

682 593 626 [683] However, this does not mean that homicide goes unnoticed in the community. After a killing the widow sings of the life of the dead man. If she is in agreement with the verdict arrived at by the killer and others, she will deny knowledge of what he has done, or even suggest that she too was aware of what harm he has caused (one widow implied that her husband, killed as a witch, was responsible for the death of four of her six children). If she objects to the verdict, she sings of what a good man he was and how blameless. She will then air her own suspicions in the following weeks as to who killed her husband.

682 683 627 Following the funeral, when the women have left the cemetary, the men sit at the grave. As they measure out a liter of liquor and pass it around, they advance hypotheses as

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682 to who did it. The consultations with curers
683 prior to the death of the supposed victims of a
627 witch will be introduced as evidence. (Some degree of consensus may have been built up beforehand, in witch-killings, by the public broadcast of accusations noted above.[8]) The focus of the discussion is not so much on who killed the dead man, but whether he was indeed a witch. This kind of mock trial occurs
[753] after every funeral, since it must be decided
[152] who caused the sickness. Emotions run very
[273] high as the liquor is passed around, and accusations are made, sometimes against those present. It was after a funeral that one man killed his son (not included in Table 1) for accusing him of having caused the death of the son's child, who was being buried.

682 In the weeks following a homicide it is dis-
[521] cussed at all the drinking sessions in the homes or in the town hall. Eventually an authoritative version begins to emerge. Those who have defended the victim then keep silent, and the
682 affair "rests in peace." Avenging the death of a
683 man judged to have been a witch, so far as I
[627] know, has never been done. In one case (no. 36, Table 1) the widow of a man killed as a witch vigorously denied the legitimacy of the act and built up a case against the killer. She spread word that it was without doubt the dead man's son by a prior marriage. When the son was killed shortly after (case 37, Table 1), everyone assumed that he had been killed by the widow's son by *her* prior marriage. However, the authoritative version concerning the second killing was that it was an accident: he had been mistaken for his brother, whom the killer was after because of rivalry over a girl.

682 *Rules for Surviving*
183

The patterning of the selection of victims and the circumstances of homicide provide the basis for formulating a set of rules that can
682 ensure survival. The long-range rules of sur-
539 vival, in the words of an elder at the occasion of
183 the death of his godchild, are:

ʒekon kak'o ta kwenta me?tal
I pay respect to my elders

hun ku kihtz'in kalnïčan
[601] I greet my younger brothers and my children (classificatory extension of kinship terms)

spisil kak' ta kwenta
To all I give respect

ha? hit lekotik. Ma taltik milel ma talik čamel

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682
539
783 Thus I fare well I have not been killed, nor have I been sick

682 A good man is of one heart, and he shows it by
156 his humility, *ben k'un yo?tan* or "very soft
828 heart." He can drink with friends on either side of the dual division of the town, and he is called upon in many household fiestas to greet the guests of the house-owner.

But the man who is "very strong of heart," *ben toyol yo?tan*, who "fails to take people into account" *ma ?awa ta kwenta*, who "abuses people," *me ya wut*, has means of survival despite the many threats to his life. He surrounds himself with a circle of *compadres*, or godparents, he especially picks out curers, both to mitigate the use of their power against him, and for them to serve as intermediaries if he should have enemies with animal spirits. When a threat becomes imminent, he may stay within his house or limit his range of activities to a very circumscribed area, always taking a weapon when he does go out. He will usually try to limit his drinking, or give it up entirely. These short-range rules of avoidance are clearly indicated by the circumstances in which killings occur: in the hills or at night, when the victim is under the influence of liquor.

[608]
[756]
[273]

682 These 37 cases of homicide reveal a regu-
[578] larity in the kinds of people and situations involved. The victims are most often men who assert power, principally curers, or men who violate standards of behavior by abusiveness or theft. Their killers are often linked to them by kinship or neighborhood, the bonds in which tensions are greatest. The regularity of time and place of homicide suggests the precautions that can be taken to avoid being killed if one has an enemy. The general failure
682 of the community social control agents to
626 bring negative sanctions against a killer indicates that homicide is an accepted solution for interpersonal conflict. The structural setting that validates this behavior is discussed below.

II. STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

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626 Case analysis, useful for discerning certain patterns, is inadequate for understanding the interrelationships among a variety of social changes in the community. An increasing rate of homicide of this magnitude indicates fundamental changes in the social matrix in which individual decisions are made; it suggests not

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only a rise in the tensions that provoke conflict, but an undermining of the social-control mechanisms for channeling them. The perception of these changes by the members of the society makes for shifts in the individual calculi, grossly measured in changes in the rate of behavior. In order to understand the interrelated problems of the sources of the increasing tensions and the reasons homicide is chosen as a means of resolving them, I have reconstructed the course of social change in the period from 1935 to 1965.

Increasing Social Tensions

New economic enterprises have increased wealth differences in the community. The best measure of this is in the increase in cattle-holding, which is a socially approved way of spending money. Twenty-five years ago, there were only a half-dozen men with cattle, and they had only one or two head each. Today, one of the herders in the community has 200 head of cattle, and 75 percent of the households have one or more each.

Cattle-herding is a "new" industry in the sense that instead of just having a team of oxen to help with agricultural labor, men are breeding cattle for profit. Because the cattle roam freely, there is much loss, and this leads to accusations of theft. I have never heard such accusations directed against anyone outside the community; crime as well as positive moral relationships is confined within the boundaries of this corporate community. Suspected cattle thieves are killed by the cattle-owner or by a killer hired by the cooperative of cattle-owners. Such killings account for six of the 37 cases analyzed above (Table 1).

The illicit distilling of liquor has also added to the town's prosperity. The liquor industry was introduced about 15 years ago, but the number of distillers has increased from 5 to 40 in the last five years. From an enterprise formerly meeting only local market needs, contraband liquor is now sold as far away as the coastal area and across the border in Guatemala. A cooperative of distillers has reduced the frictions that immediately followed the introduction of liquor-distilling. The cooperative pays the fines of any member caught distilling, and in addition threatens to use group action against informers, who were formerly tempted to earn the 200 pesos offered by federal agents. But the envy aroused by the sight of those who profit from this enterprise,

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474 as with the cattle industry, is a covert cause
578 for personal attacks on other grounds.

A third enterprise, trucking, has caused a
494 realignment of political interests in factions
494 associated with two truck-owning cooperatives.
578 Membership in one of the cooperatives, or patronage of one of the two trucks, arouses the enmity of members of the other cooperative. Several threats have been made on the lives of the owners and the operators, but the only damage done has been to tires.

682 The tensions resulting from the introduction
578 of these new enterprises cannot be fully measured by the deaths attributed to direct economic conflict. Wealth differences resulting
682 from the new enterprises excite envy, and with
578 it come accusations of witchcraft. In this com-
556 munity, witchcraft killing does not perform
754 the normative function of reducing wealth
[114] differentiation that Kluckhohn saw operating among the Navaho (1944), since it is the poor man who is killed as a witch, not the rich man.
[683] The slaying of the envious witch exacerbates the economic differentiation that provides the seedbed for conflict.

578 Another new source of tension is found in the
423 growing demand for political leadership or
668 even independence from the township by the *ejido* colonies formed since land reform went into effect in 1937. The inept maneuvers of two
[682] founders of the ejido colonies in hot country resulted in two homicides (cases 12 and 18 in
[178] Table 1).[8] The increasing strength of these hamlets will mean that more attempts will be made in the future to gain political equality and or independence. Whether this will result in increasing homicides will depend on social-control agencies external to the Indian communities.

682 Homicide occurring as a direct result of
578 economic and political competition represents a new strategy in the community. The decision
[626] to kill rather than to use other negative sanctions is related to the social-control mechanisms discussed below.

Changing Mechanisms of Social Control

626 A system of social control rests not only on
182 the exercise of negative sanctions, but on the sense of personal security derived from confi-
[756] dence in the institutions of control. In Teklum,
[769] the maintenance of control was formerly centered in the guardianship against malevolent spirits held by the ancestor spirits and
000 the curers. The "police force," made up of ten

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625 The "police force", made up of ten
626 Indians of the town who served without pay for a year, acted as errand boys more than as guardians of public safety. The townspeople conformed to the cultural code of behavior because of a sense that their welfare was being cared for.

626 More recently, the breakdown of certain
178 structural features and competition between
756 new and old leaders have undermined non-
violent methods for the maintenance of social
[128] control. These changes will be discussed in terms of (1) the organization of the curing profession, (2) conflict between the curers and the civil authority, and (3) how both the curing profession and the civil authority are affected by the breakdown of the old dual division of the town.

[124] (1) *Organization of the curing profession.* Perception of structural changes in the curing profession and their effect on attitudes are indicated in the following statement by an informant.

> Formerly there were not many curers. Only two—one in the low side and the other in the high side. They alone spoke together. They walked every night, looking and watching over the pueblo to see that no illness was brought in, checking to see who was bringing it and to see if there was any illness of God [reference to contagious diseases]. They saw which of the children had a soul [reference to the third soul, the *swayohel* or animal spirit, which gives the power to cure and to do evil].
>
> [194] If anyone wanted to be cured, they bathed them, cured them, and in a little while people got better because there was good illness only. If later on it turned into a disease of the devil, with their animal spirit they seized the force of the illness.
>
> When there was a contagious disease, and a witch "brought heat," and the children began to die, the two curers alone consulted and waited to see who had brought the evil and where they lived. One of them went to the town hall and gave an account of the fact that they had taken care of the evil and gotten rid of it. It was not necessary to gather together the pueblo only the two knew what was the matter and how to care for it.
>
> The [two] leader curers of each section [*statal ?u'uletik*] alone ordered other curers. No one else could enter curing until permitted by the leaders. They continued in power until they died, and then one of the younger curers took over.
>
> Beginning in 1940, more curers started to enter on their own accord. The elder curer had died, and his successor was not recognized. People saw that someone could pulse, and so they would ask him to cure.
>
> Now when there is an epidemic, the president

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626 178 756 orders the curers to gather together. The curers look for the man who has "brought the heat." And then they kill him. Formerly it was not so.

The statement points to two interacting features of change within the curing profession: (1) the loss of leadership and of control over entry into the profession and (2) the loss of faith in the guardianship function of the curers. The effect of these changes has been to reduce security and the maintenance of social control.

756 178 [621] Formerly the recognized leader of the curers in each section of the dual division legitimized entry of new curers and expelled those who abused their power. When these curers died, there was no one of sufficient power to replace them. In listing curers who are active today, there is no agreement as to who the leading curers are or even as to whether there are leaders.

756 Loss of leadership in the curing profession has led to competition among the curers. There is discussion such as the following concerning who is the strongest.

> When N, a former curer, killed as a witch, was alive, he was land-control officer. When we were half drunk one day, the president asked him: "Tell me who is the strongest of all you who know curing." N replied, "Ah, you want to hear. There is no one who is very strong, only the dead Mama, K, and myself." The president said, "But Man D is good." N said, "Less so. I know because one time we proved it, at a meeting of the curers. I arrived as a sheep, and 'took out' [literal translation of *lok'*] one black dog. He took out a sheep and a pig and ordered them to run. And I saw that they could not run. After my animals ran a little with his, mine arrived first. It is thus that I saw his were less strong."

[541] The present competition among the curers to assert their power by telling such stories or by displaying fearlessness in the bullfights held in community fiestas is symptomatic of the disruption caused by the breakdown in the hierarchy of the profession. When curing was a controlled profession, abusive conduct by the curers was minimized, but the new curers are reputed to use their power for their own gain. The following story is typical:

> 756 539 J, born in Tetikil, went to live in hot country. A friend invited him to drink. J, who was reputed to be a curer, said to his friend when they were half drunk, "Do you want to 'take out' a girl?" His friend said, "No, how can you?" "*Pendejo*," J replied. "I can because I have an animal

[swayobel]." "What one?" asked his friend. "You won't be afraid?" asked J. And then he put his shirt and hat on the floor, spoke three words (my friend didn't say what), and raised his hat and shirt, and a horse appeared. He did this again and a bull appeared. He was a great *?ak'lamal* [witch]. He stole a great deal. He was killed by five bullets.

Such stories of curers "who walk on both sides" (*sbe?en ta ta mehk*) are favorites in the drinking sessions of Teklum. The power of curers inspires fear, so much so that some of the town presidents have been afraid of putting them in prison.

The open competition between curers serves to undermine the faith of the people in their guardianship function. This function was believed to have been acquired by the leaders from the *me?tiktatik*, the ancestors, who were said to live in a cave in a hill near the town, from which came the progenitors of the present townspeople. To carry out this guardianship function, the animal spirits of the two leading curers roamed the streets at night, when the evil spirits were out, each one remaining within the limits of his own side of the dual division. In this role, the two major curers were called the *me?iltatiletik*, a term derived from the one referring to the ancestors.

The loss of faith in the guardianship function of the curers was coincident with the loss of belief in the presence of the me?tiktatik. Some deny that the me?tiktatik live in the cave anymore, and others say they just appear on the day of their fiesta, the Day of the Cross in the Catholic calendar. This fiesta formerly was an important event in establishing the guardian power of the leader curers, since they were the only ones who dared enter the cave and talk to the ancestors. But this fear and this belief have gone. In 1960 one young man of the pueblo entered the cave on the day of the fiesta, when the curers were "deceiving the people" in claiming that they were talking to the ancestors; the fact that he dared enter the cave indicates an ambient distrust (in part resulting from verbal attacks by the priest, who at that time was gaining more power in the town). By now, on the Day of the Cross the church and civil officials, the women prayermakers, and an assistant of the priest, the *fiscal*, go to the cave, but the curers are no longer present, even as bystanders. The curers have tried to buttress belief in the guardianship of the ancestors by claiming that a nephew of the ancestors is now in residence in

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178 the cave and that they are in communication
756 with him. But these claims are met with ex-
769 pressions of disbelief by the people. Almost everyone is convinced not only that the curers do not now talk with the ancestors, but that the ancestors no longer look over them from the watchout hill outside their cave.

756 The loss of control by the curers is drama-
178 tized in the long passage quoted above con-
731 trasting the past and present treatment of epidemics. Formerly the two leaders of the curers consulted together and announced to the president that they had rid the town of evil. Now the curers as a group are ordered to come before the civil authority. There, in a
[273] long examination called *?it yo?tan*--"taking the heart"--in which 18 liters of liquor are consumed, the assembled curers and civil authorities decide who among them is responsible for bringing in the witchcraft that is causing the epidemic. Later in the evening,
[682] one of the curers is usually killed (cases 11 and 29, Table 1).

756 *(2) Conflict between the curers and the civil*
578 *authority.* The competition between the curers and the civil authority can be traced in a series of incidents beginning in the '30's and culminating in an open confrontation in the spring of 1966.

756 The first incident occurred in 1932, when
578 the town was still part of the neighboring
682 Ladino township.

683 I went and asked permission of the authorities to
[632] kill his enemy, a curer, who he thought was bewitching his brother-in-law. The president went to the house of the suspected witch with the order to imprison him. He said they were going to take him to the neighboring township center to put him in jail. The group of authorities set off with the suspected witch. On the way, another group met them and asked them where they were going. The president replied, "To H." The group that had encountered them asked if they would like a drink to beat their body. They gave one cup, and then another. Then they cut up the suspected witch with a machete and put his body in the cave of the ancestors. When the widow enquired the next day where her husband was, the president said that the man must have gone to the finca.

The ambush by the killers was prearranged in the town court, and the president covered their deed when questions were asked.

[622] In 1940, the leading curer of the lower section was president. When he killed a man who

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accused him of being a witch, he was put in the local jail by the judge and then removed to the departmental capital. During his term of imprisonment an epidemic broke out in the town; it was attributed to witchcraft supposedly practiced by him and by two other curers who remained in town. These two were then imprisoned. After they were set free, all three men were killed in different episodes involving accusations of witchcraft. Permission to act as executioners was granted by the civil authority.

In the past, the public review of a case before a killing probably served to minimize homicide, since permission was not always granted. Since 1953, when a large highway first linked the town to the departmental capital and communication between this center of justice and the local township increased, the civil authority has not given permission, and prior review of witchcraft cases occurs only with epidemics.

The final incident in which the civil authority confronted the curers occurred in the spring of 1966. The president accused one of the curers of cutting short his life by lighting candles in the mountains. The curers were called together to hear the threat and to go to the hill to look at the evidence. The accused curer remained at home pleading that he was sick. He was warned not to pursue his witchcraft, and as yet there has been no use of violence on either side. This open confrontation without the use of violence may indicate a change in the strategy of conflict with the growing power of the president.

(3) *Breakdown of the dual division.* The loss of internal controls in the curing profession and the conflict for power and control by the civil officials and the curers are related to a more fundamental change in the social structure of the community. Formerly the division of the town into two sections provided a channel for opposition as well as cooperation. Recruitment into leadership positions in both the civil hierarchy and the curing hierarchy was based upon residence. The system provided checks and balances in the exercise of power, for the two principales—one from each section of the dual division—were supposed to act as watchdogs over the curers. The shift in the locus of social control from the principales to the president has been marked by the open confrontation with the curers.

ooo The authority of the president, however,

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The authority of the president, however, depends on the use of legal sanctions of prison sentences and fines imposed by extracommunity enforcement agencies in the departmental capital. The weakness of these sanctions—the fine for homicide is 1,000 to 3,000 pesos or three to five years' imprisonment—means that these threats do not have a controlling effect on people's decisions to act. Homicide, carried out by individuals who feel themselves to be threatened, is a supplementary mechanism for social control. Cast in the idiom of witch-killing, homicide is the quasi-official execution of a community threat.

The breakdown in the former structural controls has not been compensated for by the intervention of extracommunity institutions. Attempts to circumvent killing are made by the priest, who counsels against it, warning that the killer will acquire the sins of the man he kills, and by the talking saint of Ixtapa, whom the Indians consult when they are pressed and who advises them to wait—their enemy will be killed for them. This advice is not sufficient to forestall all killings. Motivated by fear, some men still seek to eliminate the object of their fear. The sense of the guardianship of the ancestors and their intermediaries, the curers, is lost along with the intervention of the civil authorities. The individual reacts, using his own means and trying to get sufficient consensus to avoid reprisal.

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Homicide in the community of Teklum can be a statement of the fear of witchcraft, of revenge, or of quasi-official reprisal depending on the circumstances and social relationships involved. Even in this small, self-contained community, homicide does not have a single meaning, analyzable within a single framework of change.

Homicide is part of the expectation pattern of the town. The patterning of the acts of homicide in terms of time, place, and agent makes possible rules of avoidance both in long- and in short-term calculations for survival. The long-range rules require respect behavior to elders, equals, and juniors and the avoidance of abusive or boasttul statements. The short-range rules are to avoid walking alone in the woods or milpas far from town, to stay home at night, and to stop drinking.

Despite the grim and expectable outcome of being killed, not all men heed these rules. The love of power and the projection of self into

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682 183 wider ranges of expression than are usually permitted in the community prompt men to assert the strength of their swayohel, to run races with the animal spirits of others in the assertion of pre-eminence, to boast of their material goods, and to "wake up dead."

682 694 178 578 The increasing rate of homicide is related to the following changes in the community:

(1) Increasing friction resulting both from the introduction of new economic enterprises and from political competition by the recently settled land-reform colonies has introduced a new kind of homicide, in which an opponent is killed either by the person whose interests are threatened or by hired killers. It has also stimulated accusations of witchcraft stemming from envy [754]

558 682 694 178 578 756 754 (2) The curers' loss of leadership and of control over entry into the curing profession has led to competition among them and to a loss of respect for their ability to overcome witchcraft. Curers have become the most frequent suspects of being witches.

(3) Loss of faith in the guardian ancestors and in the guardianship functions acquired from them by the curers has further undermined the position of the curers as agents of social control. This has aggravated the sense of insecurity and fear, which provokes the uncontrolled use of individual violence.

682 694 178 621 626 756 (4) The shift of power from the principales to the town president has led to a breakdown in the system of checks and balances exerted by the principales over the curers, and to a direct confrontation of the curers by civil officials.

(5) In the confrontations of the civil authorities and the curers in the '40's and early '50's, the fact that a witchcraft case was officially reviewed and the killing of the witch sanctioned may have served as a brake on the number of such homicides. Since 1953, when this practice was abandoned, those who have felt themselves or their families to be the victims of witchcraft have been left to their own recourse.

682 694 756 178 626 683

178 578 682 624 632 756 The organizational changes summarized here are provoked by structural changes affecting recruitment into the positions of power and the validation of leadership in the exercise of power. The dual division of the town provided an accepted basis for recruiting

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leaders; both in the civil authority and in the curing profession. The transition from the old hierarchy of control to the new leadership structure is still in process. In the most recent confrontation of the civil authority and curers, the fact that neither side resorted to violence suggests the transitional nature of homicide as a solution in intracommunal conflict.

This study of homicide indicates that the changing rate of behavior points to structural change, but does not in itself indicate what kind of change occurs or from what motives it stems. Qualitative case analysis related to structural changes within the recall of informants is essential for understanding social process. [121]

NOTES

[1] Field work is based on two periods of residence in the community in 1964 and 1965; it was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. I am grateful for comments by Paul Friedrich, Richard Henderson, Harold Scheffler, and Peter Wilson, who have improved the original version read at the 1965 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. I remain responsible for the contents of the paper.

[2] Henry and Short (1954:68) analyze both suicide and homicide as undifferentiated aggressive reactions to frustration, the rates of which vary —in the first case inversely and in the second case directly— with the strength of the external control system over behavior. Their assumption that homicide is motivationally a single phenomenon and not an expression of a variety of motives stems from the assumption that all cases of aggressive acts are the result of frustration. Straus and Straus (1964:587) apply a similar correlational analysis of homicide and suicide rates with structural features of society in Ceylon, but come to opposite conclusions. They maintain that one would expect greater evidence of homicide in a "loosely structured society," by which they mean one with considerable sanctioning of variation in individual behavior. These studies contradict each other in the conclusions that they reach by similar analytical processes, but they are attempts to move away from such psychoanalytic reasoning as the death-wish theory.

[3] Bohannan's (1960) survey of homicide and suicide in African societies represents a useful model for comparing the total pattern of homicide cross-culturally. In presenting the case material here, I have used a similar format, adding to it the circumstances surrounding the killing. In the analysis of these materials, I have diverged from Bohannan's model in trying to demonstrate the linkage among the components —the ratios, to use Burke's (1945) terminology of scene-setting actor/agent.

[4] The term "witch" is a translation of the Tzeltal term *ʔaʔ-jomal*, literally "giver of sickness." The term "curer" is a translation of *ʔaʔtas*. The power to cure and to give sickness stems from the possession of a *muyuʔun*, or animal spirit.

[5] For a discussion of the tactics of gaining consensus in witch-killings, see Manning Nash (1960).

[6] Political homicide by agrarian leaders, which is so frequent in the central plateau (Friedrich 1962), is a relatively recent phenomenon in the retreat zones of Indian population. The cases analyzed by Friedrich are a strategy of political power stemming from a revolutionary background, and the cultural assumptions to which he points contrast with those underlying witch-killings. My only comparable case is, significantly, found outside the traditional center, in the new ejido colony.

[7] Jules Henry (1936) sees the formula of fear and anger as the

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000 syndrome of Kaingang society. The frustration-aggression formulation has blinded us to many other possible formulas in sentiment and behavior.

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